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SUBJECT: CROATIAN LEADERS WELCOME KOSOVO PM CEKU, STRESS
MINORITY PROTECTION ISSUES

Classified By: Amb Robert Bradtke for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Following up on his October commitment to President Bush to promote regional stability in the run-up to the Kosovo final status determination, PM Sanader met Kosovo PM Ceku in Zagreb December 1. MFA State Secretary Biscevic told Ambassador December 4 that the GOC and President Mesic emphasized with Ceku the importance of establishing concrete protections for minorities. Biscevic noted that Ceku identified the peaceful post-war reintegration of Eastern Slavonia (formerly held by rebel Serbs) as a valuable model for Kosovo, and told the PM that he sees Croatia as the best regional advocate for Kosovo. Sanader offered to receive a minority delegation from Kosovo, which Biscevic said the ethnic-Serb Kosovo Minister for Refugee Affairs would coordinate. The GOC also offered to provide technical assistance in building administrative capacity at the local level, and to accept Kosovo diplomats at the Croatian diplomatic academy. Arriving in Zagreb from Moscow, Ceku told the GOC that he did not think Russia would oppose Kosovo's independence.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: His willingness to receive Ceku (and go public with the basic points of the meetings) underscores Sanader's desire to contribute to regional stability in the run-up to Kosovo's final status decision. With Croatia's treatment of its own ethnic Serb minority under scrutiny in connection with its EU and NATO aspirations, Sanader is all too aware of the sensitivity of the issue and its potential for exploitation by Belgrade.

BRADTKE